
GUIDE FOR WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION

Wharton County Junior College
English and Humanities

Courses

ENGL-1301 and ENGL-1302

Based on

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers
Purdue OWL

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1 Introduction

The Modern Language Association (MLA) of America is the principal professional association in the United States for scholars of language and literature. The MLA was founded in 1883, as a discussion and advocacy group for the study of literature and modern languages, and aims to strengthen the study and teaching of language and literature.

The MLA style is accepted as the standard for most disciplines in the Humanities divisions. This handout provides **provides** an overview and a quick reference of the basics of using MLA in academic papers. Styles and examples in this document are not meant to be inclusive of all MLA styles. Students are encouraged to refer to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition) for more information and examples.

2 General Format

MLA style sets the guidelines for formatting manuscripts using the English language in writing. MLA style also provides writers a system for citing sources through parenthetical citation in essays and Works Cited pages. Writers who adopt the MLA style build credibility by attributing referenced material to their authors and protect themselves from accusations of plagiarism.

For the purpose of this course, all assignments will strictly adhere to the following guidelines (refer to Figure 1 for an example):

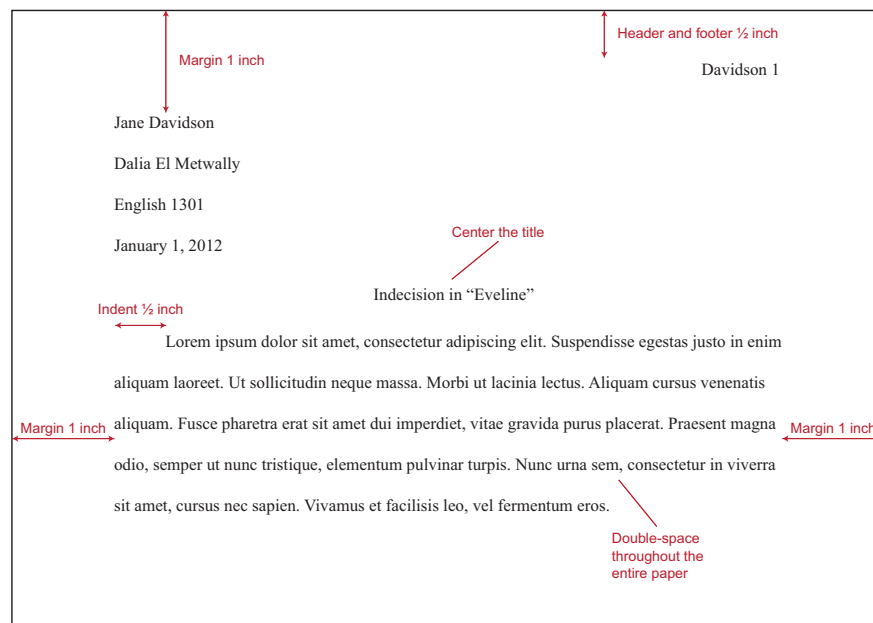


Figure 1: Example page of an MLA paper

1. Type your manuscript on a computer and print it out on standard, white letter-size paper. Print only on one side of the paper. Set the margins of your manuscript to one inch on all sides. Set the headers and footers to one-half inch from the edge of the paper.

2. Do not make a title page. On the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Double-space and center the title. Use standard capitalization. Do not underline, italicize, place the title in quotation marks, or use all upper-case letters.
3. Create a header in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. The header should include your name, followed by a space then the page number. Number all pages consecutively. The header on the first page may be omitted.
4. Double-space the text throughout your entire manuscript.
5. Use only Helvetica or Times Roman fonts (or equivalent fonts). The font size should be 12 points.
6. Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks.
7. Indent the first line of paragraphs one-half inch from the left margin. Use the TAB key as opposed to using the space bar multiple times.
8. Use italics throughout your essay for the titles of longer works (refer to Section 3 for more information on in-text citations), and only when absolutely necessary to provide emphasis.
9. If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Works Cited page (refer to Section 4.1 on page 6 for more information on Works Cited pages). Entitle the section Notes (centered, unformatted).

3 In-Text Citations

To refer to the works of others in your text, use parenthetical citation: place the source of information in parentheses after a quote. The source information required depends on the source medium and the source's entry in the Works Cited page (refer to Section 5 on page 7). All sources of information provided in-text must correspond to a source in the Cited Works page.

3.1 Formatting Quotations

The style for quotations depends on the length of the quoted text. Short quotations are four or fewer lines of prose, or three or fewer lines of verse. Long quotations are more than four lines of prose, or more than three lines of verse.

Short quotations: For short quotations:

1. Enclose the quotation within double quotation marks.
2. Use the standard author–page citation format in the text, and include the details of the source on the Works Cited pages.
3. Punctuation marks of the quoted text — such as **question marks**, periods, commas, semicolons, etc. — must come within the double-quotation marks. Punctuation marks that are not part of the quoted text but are part of your text should appear after the parenthetical citation.

4. When quoting poetry, use a slash followed by a space to mark the end of verse lines and provide the line numbers in the text.

As Coach Clark explained, “We lost the game because we were overconfident and failed to take the other team’s defense seriously enough” (32).

Parker agrees that “the same claims are often made for almost any group of writers” (11).

Heaney directly compares poetry writing to the digging his ancestors did: “Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I’ll dig with it” (29–31).

Long quotations: For long quotations:

1. Place quotations in a freestanding block of text and omit quotation marks.
2. Start the quotation on a new line.
3. Indent the entire quote one inch from the left margin.
4. When citing multiple paragraphs, indent the first line of the quotation by an additional one-quarter inch.
5. Parenthetical citation should come after the closing punctuation mark.
6. Maintain the original line breaks:

The author, David Bottoms, is wise to the fact that men often use sports to communicate their feelings. The persona of the poem, however, takes years to realize his father’s message. Once he realizes the importance of sports to their relationship, he sends a message back to his father:

and I never learned what you were laying down.
Like a hand brushed across the bill of a cap,
let this be the sign
I’m getting a grip on the sacrifice. (20–23)

3.2 Formatting Sources

General guidelines Use the author–page method of in-text citation: the author’s last name and the page number(s) from which the quotation or paraphrase is taken must appear in the text:

Romantic poetry is characterized by the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 263).

This citation tells the reader that the information in the sentence can be located on page 263 by an author named Wordsworth. The Works Cited page provides a complete reference to the source:

Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads*. London: Oxford U.P., 1967. Print.

Electronic sources: For electronic and other sources that do not include a page number, include the author's name without the page number.

Author unknown: If the author of the text is not given, include the next piece of information in the reference (the title of the article or book) in its place. Place the title in quotation marks if it is a short work (e.g., articles), or italicize it if it is a longer work (e.g., plays or books) and provide a page number.

Citing more than one source with the same last name: If you cite more than one work by a particular author, include a shortened title for the particular work from which you are quoting to distinguish it from the others. Put short titles of books in italics and short titles of articles in quotation marks. If two or more authors have the same last name, provide both authors' first initials (or the authors' full name if different authors share initials) in your citation.

Citing sources with more than one author: For a source with three or fewer authors, list the authors' last names in the text or in the parenthetical citation:

Smith, Yang, and Moore argue that tougher gun control is not needed in the United States (76). **The authors state "Tighter gun control in the United States erodes Second Amendment rights" (Smith, Yang, and Moore 76).**

For a source with more than three authors, use the work's bibliographic information as a guide for your citation. Provide the first author's last name followed by et al.:

Legal experts counter Smith, Yang, and Moore's argument by noting that the current spike in gun violence in America compels law makers to adjust gun laws (Jones et al. 4).

4 Special Formats

4.1 Endnotes and Footnotes

Endnotes and footnotes are used to include additional information, such as definitions, explanations, or citations. The extensive use of explanatory or digressive notes is discouraged. However, you may use endnotes or footnotes for bibliographic notes, which refer to other publications readers may consult. The endnotes or footnotes should start numbering at the Arabic number one (do not use symbols), and should continue consecutive numbering in superscript format throughout the essay.

[...] , but Peter Scotto has offered another view.³

3. Peter Scotto, "Censorship, Reading, and Interpretation: A Case Study from the Soviet Union," *PMLA* 109 (1994): 61.

Endnotes appear on a separate page entitled Notes (centered, no formatting), or Note if there is only one note. The Notes page should come after the last page of the essay and before the Works Cited page. The notes on this page should be listed by consecutive Arabic numbers that correspond to the notation in the

text. Each endnote should be indented by five spaces, and subsequent lines should be flush with the left margin.

For footnotes, begin four single-spaced lines (or two double-spaced lines) below the main text. Footnotes use single-spaced lines — as an exception to the double-spaced-lines rule throughout the essay — with the first line indented by five spaces and subsequent lines flush with the left margin.

4.2 Abbreviations

Refer to the *MLA Handbooks for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition) for all the information related to the use of abbreviations. A subset of commonly-used abbreviations is included in this document for the purpose of this course.

Uppercase letter abbreviations: Do not use periods or spaces in abbreviations composed solely of capital letters, except in the case of proper names:

US, MA, CD, HTML
P. D. James, J. R. R. Tolkien, E. B. White

Lowercase letter abbreviations: Use a period if the abbreviation ends in a lower case letter, unless referring to an internet suffix, where the period should come before the abbreviation: assn., conf., Eng., esp. .com, .edu, .gov (URL suffixes). Degree names are an exception (e.g., PhD, EdD, PsyD).

Abbreviations in citations: Condense citations using abbreviations, e.g., time and location within citations. Abbreviate month names longer than four letters (Jan., Sept., Nov.), and geographic names of states, provinces and countries (Logan, UT; Manchester, Eng.; Sherbrooke, QC). Shorten publisher's names as much as possible, while providing enough information to identify the publisher.

5 Works Cited Pages

You must provide a Works Cited page at the end of your research paper. All entries in the Works Cited page must correspond to the works cited in your main text.

5.1 Basic Rules

1. Begin your Works Cited page on a separate page at the end of your research paper.
2. Label the page Works Cited (centered, no formatting).
3. Double-space all citations; do not skip spaces between entries.
4. Indent the second and subsequent lines of citations five spaces so that you create a hanging indent.
5. List page numbers of sources efficiently. For example, when referring to pages 134 through 162, list the page numbers as 134–62.

6. List the medium of publication: Print, Web, Film, CD-ROM, or DVD.
7. It is not required to provide URLs for Web entries. If you elect to include them, place them in angle brackets after the entry and end with a period. For long URLs, break lines only at slashes.

5.2 Capitalization and Punctuation

Capitalize each word in the titles of articles, books, etc., but do not capitalize articles (the, an), prepositions, or conjunctions unless one is the first word of the title or subtitle (e.g., *The Story of an Hour*, *The Art of the Handshake*). Use italics for titles of larger works (books, magazines) and quotation marks for titles of shorter works (poems, articles).

5.3 Listing Author Names

Entries are listed alphabetically by the author's last name.

Single author: Author names are written last name first; middle names or middle initials follow the first name (e.g., Rich, Adrienne Cecile). Do not include titles or degrees with names.

More than one work by an author: If you have cited more than one work by a particular author, order the entries alphabetically by title, and use three hyphens in place of the author's name for every entry after the first line. When an author or collection editor appears both as the sole author of a text and as the first author of a group, list the entries as the sole author first:

Laurence, David Herbert. *Touch and Go*. [...]
—. *The White Horse*. [...]

Author unknown: Alphabetize works with no known author by their title; use a shortened version of the title in the parenthetical citations in your paper.

5.4 Books

The author's name or a book appears in last name, first name format. The basic form for a book citation is:

Last name, First name. *Title of Book*. City of Publication: Publisher, Year
of Publication. Medium of Publication.

Book with one author: Use the standard format.

Henley, Patricia. *The Hummingbird House*. Denver: MacMurray, 1999.
Print.

Book with more than one author: The first given name appears in last-name, first-name format; subsequent author names appear in first-name last-name format. If there are more than three authors, either list only the first author followed by the phrase *et al.*, or list all the authors in the order in which their names appear on the title page. For example, using *et al.*:

Wysocki, Anne Frances, et al. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2004. Print.

Listing all authors is another alternative:

Wysocki, Anne Frances, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2004. Print.

Two or more books by the same author: List works alphabetically by title. Provide the author's name in last name, first name format for the first entry only. For each subsequent entry by the same author, use three hyphens and a period:

Palmer, William J. *Dickens and New Historicism*. New York: St. Martin's, 1997. Print.
—. *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993. Print.

Book by a corporate author or organization: A corporate author may include a commission, a committee, or a group that does not identify individual members on the title page. List the names of corporate authors in the place where an author's name typically appears at the beginning of the entry.

Book with no known author: List by title of the book in italics. Incorporate these entries alphabetically just as you would with works that include an author name. Parenthetical citation of a book with no author requires that you provide the name of the work — in full or a shortened version — and the page number in parentheses.

A translated book: Cite as you would any other book. Add "Trans." — the abbreviation for translated by — and follow with the name(s) of the translator(s).

5.5 Periodicals

Periodicals (e.g., magazines, newspapers, and scholarly journals) that appear in print require the same medium of publication designator — Print — as books, but the MLA Style method for citing these materials and the items required for these entries are quite different from MLA book citations.

Article in a magazine: Cite by listing the article's author, putting the title of the article in quotation marks, and italicizing the periodical title. Follow with the date of publication. Remember to abbreviate the month. The basic format is as follows:

Author(s). "Title of Article." *Title of Periodical* Day Month Year: pages.
Medium of publication.

Article in a newspaper: Cite a newspaper article as you would a magazine article, but note the different pagination in a newspaper. If there is more than one edition available for that date (as in an early and late edition of a newspaper), identify the edition following the date (e.g., 17 May 1987, late ed.). If the newspaper is a less well-known or local publication, include the city name and state in brackets after the title of the newspaper. For example:

Trembacki, Paul. "Brees Hopes to Win Heisman for Team." *Purdue Exponent* [West Lafayette, IN] 5 Dec. 2000: 20. Print.

5.6 Electronic Sources

When including the medium of publication for electronic sources, list the medium as Web. Maintain personal copies of electronic information, when possible (print or save Web pages). MLA does not require the use of URLs in MLA citations. If you elect to include the URL, use angle brackets around the link and break URLs only after slashes. For example:

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. S. H. Butcher. *The Internet Classics Archive*. Web Atomic and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 13 Sept. 2007. Web. 4 Nov. 2008.
<<http://classics.mit.edu/>>.

Basic style for citations of electronic sources: Collect as much of the following information as possible both for your citations and for your research notes:

1. Author, editor names, or both (if available).
2. Article name in quotation marks (if applicable).
3. Title of the Website, project, or book in italics.
4. Any version numbers available, including revisions, posting dates, volumes, or issue numbers.
5. Publisher information, including the publisher name and publishing date.
6. Page numbers (if available).
7. Medium of publication.
8. Date you accessed the material.
9. URL (optional).

Abbreviations commonly used with electronic sources: If publishing information is unavailable for entries that require publication information such as publisher (or sponsor) names and publishing dates, MLA requires the use of special abbreviations to indicate that this information is not available. Use *n.p.* to indicate that neither a publisher nor a sponsor name has been provided. Use *n.d.* when the electronic source does not provide a publication date. When an entry requires that you provide a page but no pages are provided in the source (as in the case of an online-only scholarly journal or a work that appears in an online-only anthology), use the abbreviation *n. pag.*

Citing an entire web site: It is necessary to list the date of access because web postings are often updated. If a URL is included, include the complete address for the site. Remember to use *n.p.* if no publisher name is available and *n.d.* if no publishing date is given.

Citing a page on a web site: For an individual page on a Web site, list the author or alias if known, followed by the information for entire Web sites as listed previously. Remember to use *n.p.* if no publisher name is available and *n.d.* if no publishing date is given.

Citing an article in a web magazine: Provide the author name, article name in quotation marks, title of the Web magazine in italics, publisher name, publication date, medium of publication, and the date of access. Remember to use *n.p.* if no publisher name is available and *n.d.* if no publishing date is given.

Citing an article in an online scholarly journal: For all online scholarly journals, provide the author(s) name(s), the name of the article in quotation marks, the title of the publication in italics, all volume and issue numbers, and the year of publication.